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Talking with Dementia: The patterns and characteristics of a unique communication

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This paper discusses the unique characteristics of communication with people with dementia. While most of the literature on dementia identifies it as a non-communicative state, and focuses on the clinical aspects of dementia and the resulting communication deficiencies, this current paper approaches the communication with people with dementia as a mutual "eye to eye", meaningful and fruitful communication, both for the person with dementia as well as for the "healthy" partner to the conversation. On the basis of the analysis of concrete situations and conversations I held with a relative who was hospitalized at an institution for people with dementia, I point at four patterns of this unique communication: 1. A mutual attempt to understand the experience of dementia; 2. The search for sequence and its absence; 3. Sliding between reality and illusion; 4. Creating mutual space in/against the institutional space. The discussion of these communication patterns has the potential of offering some tools to people that are coping with the challenge of maintaining the relationship with their relatives who were diagnosed with dementia.

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